

Patriarchy

The comments are exact and true;
the feelings are real and raw,
the reality is demoralizing and devastating.

A defensive stance is reactive;
a corporate and bureaucratic stance is minimalist,
a patriarchal response exasperates the crisis.

My own reaction:

I started reading the grand jury report of sexual abuse in several dioceses of Pennsylvania. I could only get through a few pages before feeling physically ill and being filled with a sense of disgust and anger and betrayal that I know is only a fraction of what the abuse victims and their families must have felt for so long.

The abuses described in this report are
“criminal and morally reprehensible.”

In a letter addressed “to the People of God”
and released in seven languages—
it’s intended for a world audience—Pope Francis said:

I acknowledge once more the suffering endured by many minors due to sexual abuse, the abuse of power and the abuse of conscience perpetrated by a significant number of clerics and consecrated persons.

The heart-wrenching pain of these victims, which cries out to heaven, was long ignored, kept quiet or silenced; their outcry was more powerful than all the measures meant to silence them.

When patriarchies are threatened by external forces (a child victim seeking accountability), strange things happen. Walls are drawn, defenses are put up. Decisions are made, often in secret, about what will protect the patriarchy and their own careers and rewards within it.

The TRUTH of a conscious faith confronts this reality.

In the first reading Joshua challenges
the people to covenant renewal.
He makes a simple statement to an unfaithful people:

Decide today whom you will serve.

The response of the people: We will serve the Lord our God...

In his letter, Pope Francis frames our response:

Today we are challenged as the People of God to take on the pain of our brothers and sisters wounded in their flesh and in their spirit.

If, in the past, the response was one of omission, today we want solidarity, in the deepest and most challenging sense, to become our way of forging present and future history.

Such solidarity demands that we in turn condemn whatever endangers the integrity of any person. A solidarity that summons us to fight all forms of corruption, especially spiritual corruption.

The claims and promises of Jesus
that we've been hearing for five weeks
arouse cynicism, ridicule, and contempt among the people.

The situation had come to the point at which
the followers of Jesus must choose and declare
for or against him—
yes or no!

This moves us
from the truth of conscious faith to intentional living.

The meaning of the Eucharist offers a challenge:

Do you believe or not?
Is this the body and blood of Christ?

Are we who share in this mystery willing to
be transformed into the Body of Christ?

The gospel question is put to us: Do you want to leave me too?

To answer as Peter: Lord to whom shall we go?
 You have the words of eternal life...

To answer as Peter presumes a conscious and articulate faith
that is then reflected in action and behavior.

What does that look like?

The People of God must engage in constant vigilance.

The Dallas Norms, adopted by the American bishops in 2002 and approved by the Holy See, have changed things in the United States. Victims of sexual abuse are given the care and concern they deserve. Reports are made to public authorities. No priest or deacon with a credible charge of child sexual abuse may remain in ministry.

As a result, almost all of the child sexual abuse cases that we hear about now are old cases.

Ninety percent of the cases in the Pennsylvania grand jury report predate 1990. Thanks to Dallas, there have been very few cases of clergy child sexual abuse in the United States since 2002.

The People of God—you—must insist that our bishops include themselves in the Norms. When they were written in 2002, they were written to cover only offending priests and deacons; bishops were and still are omitted.

The People of God must support the victims.

The victims who have come forward have not harmed the church. Instead, it is the other way around. Child sexual abuse can cause lifetime injury, often leading to drug and alcohol abuse, unsuccessful careers, unsuccessful marriages, and even suicide—I have seen all of this in my own experience.

The victims have suffered enough.

The People of God must support good priests

We also move forward from this crisis by valuing the priests who did and continue to do their jobs the right way, giving completely of themselves for their people.

Again, the letter of Pope Francis provides context:

It is always helpful to remember that “in salvation history, the Lord saved one people. We are never completely ourselves unless we belong to a people.

Consequently, the only way that we have to respond to this evil...is to experience it as a task regarding all of us as the People of God.

This awareness of being part of a people and a shared history will enable us to acknowledge our past sins and mistakes with a penitential openness that can allow us to be renewed from within.

Without the active participation of all the Church's members, everything being done to uproot the culture of abuse in our communities will not be successful in generating the necessary dynamics for sound and realistic change.

This brings me to the Eucharistic ethic implied in Paul's words to the Ephesians:

Defer to one another out of reverence for Christ.

As members of the Body of Christ
we are to give ourselves freely to one another,
we are to love each other as we care for and love ourselves.

Despite the historically conditioned examples Paul uses,
his underlying message is one of radical equality.
It is self-destructive to abuse and hurt and degrade one another
under any circumstances.

This is our challenge for the church
to move beyond patriarchy and clericalism
toward radical solidarity and equality.

Pope Francis describes clericalism:

We are again invited to enter the heart
of the miracle and mystery of the Eucharist,
to celebrate the moment of our future and ultimate fulfillment,
to stand at that place where we are transformed into the
Body of Christ present in our world.

Sources:

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